

CTA looking at Red Line extension to Far South Side

by Wendell Hutson

Chicago Transit Authority officials, local politicians and community organizations all agree that the proposed Red Line extension project is not only long overdue but a win-win situation for the Far South Side.

"I cannot speak for my predecessors but this should have been done years ago," said CTA President Richard Rodriguez about the proposed extension.

Once completed the proposed \$1.3 billion federally funded project would extend the Red Line to 130th Street and Ellis Avenue utilizing some tracks already present on the route but also building an elevated platform with tracks. The elevated train would add stops in the vicinity at 103rd Street, 111th Street and 115th Street. A new terminal would be built at 130th Street, near the Altgeld Gardens public housing complex.

Currently the Red Line ends at 95th and State.

Rodriguez said he does not expect a reduction in bus service to the Far South Side. And while he declined to give a completion date for the Red Line he said the sooner, the better.

"If it were up to me I would have wanted it done yesterday," he explained. "Additionally, the extension would free up congestion at the 95th Street terminal, which also serves as a stop for the Greyhound Bus Lines and Pace bus." The project ultimately will connect the Far South Side with the rest of city, said U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-2nd, whose congressional district covers that area.

"The West Pullman and Roseland communities will no longer be disconnected from the city," Jackson told the *Defender*. "We have to make this a priority issue. The absence of the Red Line being extended would mean residents will continue to be disconnected from the rest of Chicago."

Jackson added that too often residents who live beyond 95th Street would drive to the Red Line depot where there are no parking lots, so residents would often park illegally and rack up parking tickets.

Rodriguez said the CTA received a lot of community input from residents and organizations, which helped decide the extension route.

The Developing Communities Project, non-profit community organization in the Roseland community, is among the organizations that worked with the CTA.

"We organized several community meetings to ensure that whatever plan the CTA chose was one that involved community input," said Gwendolyn Rice, executive director for the Developing Communities Project. "I told residents it was important for them to attend the meetings so they could learn more about the project and to give feedback. We did not want a lot of displacement of homeowners."

Displacement was also a concern of Ald. Anthony Beale (9th), whose ward includes the Roseland community. "There will be minimum displacement. We put a ground swell of pressure on the CTA to make this project a priority," he said. "I am proud of the community for sticking with this issue."

Students attending high schools on the Far South Side, such as Carver Military High School, 13100 S. Doty Ave., Christian Fenger Academy High School, 11220 S. Wallace Ave. and Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory High School, 250 E. 111th St., would no longer have to endure long bus rides to the Red Line.

"This extension will make life easier for everyone, especially students" added Beale.

Ald. Carrie Austin (34th), who supports the Red Line extension, also represents the Far South Side. Her ward includes the West Pullman community, which is where a new multi-million dollar Salvation Army community center will be built.

In the end Beale, Austin, Rice and Rodriguez collective said the extension would help revitalize a section of Chicago often forgotten.

"The far South Side is on the move. The extension will attract more businesses and homeowners. Those two components alone is a recipe for more economic development," Beale said.

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